



News Release

For Immediate Release

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Ontario is Losing the Fight Against Invasive Species because It's Barely Trying: Auditor General

(Toronto) Ontario incurs damages of about \$3.6 billion a year from invasive species, but the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry spends less than \$4 million every year to combat them. Because that amount isn't nearly enough, invasive species spread without much resistance, and Ontario's farms, forests, and fisheries, as well as its health care, tourism and recreation sectors suffer substantial harm.

"Ontario's risk for the introduction of new invasive species is among the highest of all provinces and territories in Canada," says Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk in her *2022 Annual Report*. "Though the people of Ontario understand the urgent need to act when a dangerous new threat emerges in the environment, the Ministry of Natural Resources acts far too slowly to take these threats seriously."

The audit found that conservation officers with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry are not well-trained to identify invasive species. And even when they do find them, they do not often use all their enforcement powers to help curb their spread. In the last six years, conservation officers issued only 11 warnings and laid zero charges.

The report notes that even the small amount of money devoted to combatting invasive species is sometimes poorly managed. For example, the province has often been slow to approve annual funding to partners on the ground who are working to combat invasive species, which prevents work from being done during the crucial months when many species are best tackled. Also, because the Ministry has historically not signed multi-year funding agreements, organizations have not had funding certainty, and they have struggled to plan efficiently, and to retain the staff they need to carry out their work. Ontario municipalities, which must manage invasive species when the province fails, do not often have the resources needed to respond effectively to these threats.

"Our audit found that, without immediate corrective action, new invasive species will continue to establish and spread in Ontario, and will become costlier and more difficult to eradicate," said Lysyk. "Effectively managing these species is crucial for protecting native plants and wildlife, which contribute to a healthy environment and a healthy economy."

The audit report includes 12 recommendations for improvement.

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Read the report at www.auditor.on.ca

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